

Adaptation of a murder/murder as adaptation: The Parker-Hulme case in Angela Carter's 'The Christchurch Murder' and Peter Jackson's *Heavenly Creatures*

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Abstract: In 1954, Honora Parker was murdered by her daughter, Pauline, and her daughter's best friend, Juliet Hulme. This article looks at the ways in which writers and filmmakers have depicted the story. It suggests that two such versions (Angela Carter's 'The Christchurch Murder' and Peter Jackson's *Heavenly Creatures*) should be seen as adaptations and read in light of a series of intertextual references to the adapters' wider bodies of work. Moreover, it suggests that Pauline and Juliet's writing is integral to each adaptation of the case. The murder was imbricated in an increasingly complex set of fantasies recorded in the girls' poetry and prose, and particularly in Pauline's diaries. By centralising this document and the role played by writing in the lead-up to the crime, Carter and Jackson invoke a source text and, at the same time, tacitly introduce questions of authorship and agency.

In *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006), Linda Hutcheon discusses how a series of twentieth-century artists have adapted the story of sixteen Carmelite nuns executed in the closing days of the Terror following the French Revolution. 'As a narrative', Hutcheon suggests, 'their story is certainly interesting, but not so obviously compelling or historically relevant as to have warranted being told and retold in the forms of the novella, film, stage play, and opera over a 30-year period of time' (Hutcheon 96). Hutcheon then traces the various versions of this story, from Baroness Gertrud von le Fort's 1931 novella *Die Letzte am Schafott* (*The Last on the Scaffold*) to Francis Poulenc's 1957 opera *Dialogues des Carmélites* (*Dialogues of the Carmelites*). She concludes that:

This particular story obviously resonated in complex ways for its various adapters. The motives for choosing the story in each case were also intensely private. The reasons for interpreting it as either a political allegory or a tale of spiritual and psychological redemption were deeply embedded in the individual histories of the adapters, as well as in the political moments in which they were writing. The specific aesthetic form each adaptation took also depended upon the particular abilities and interests of the new creators (Hutcheon 106).

Hutcheon describes how an historical event, the details of which are broadly agreed upon by historians, has been moulded and transformed by adapters with highly individual interpretations and motivations; how, paraphrasing Millicent Marcus, 'the adaptive process is a total of the encounters among institutional cultures, signifying systems, and personal motivations' (Hutcheon 106). Despite the absence of a literary ur-

text it is possible to trace a process of adaptation across the various versions of the nuns' tale. Indeed, the known facts fulfil a function similar to that of a literary source, from which the adapter emphasises certain elements, marginalises others, and invents more besides. However, tracing this transformation in terms of authorial intention is, *pace* Linda Hutcheon, always going to be problematic. One can make educated assertions based, for example, on the religious or moral beliefs of a writer or director, but a number of questions remain: how might one distinguish between stated or inferred intentions and those which are hidden, even from the adapter him or herself? how significant are such intentions if they are not evident in the text itself? and how stable is this intentional dimension once the text is received by the reader or viewer? Adaptations are undoubtedly shaped by the interests and interpretations of the adapter, but this authorial signature might more clearly be traced in the relationship between an individual adaptation and the adapter's wider body of work. Therefore whilst Hutcheon's reading of the story of the Carmelite nuns is valuable in establishing the adaptive transformations involved in treating a real life story, this process might better be understood as one of intertextuality and cross-reference.

In the various adaptations of the 1954 Parker-Hulme murder one can see how this intertextual process works. This real life case has again inspired a range of adapters, each of whom treats the material in startlingly different ways. Each adapter takes the 'text' of the murder and from it fashions something that is both identifiably their own and built upon an intertextual lineage. It is possible to establish this lineage through close comparison with the adapters' other work and with the historical source material

on which they based their adaptations. The broad facts of the Parker-Hulme murder are these. On 22 June 1954 Honora Parker was murdered by her daughter, Pauline Parker, and Pauline's best friend, Juliet Hulme. Apparently blaming Honora for their imminent separation, the two girls, aged 16 and 15 respectively, attacked her with a piece of brick wrapped in the end of a stocking whilst out for a walk in Victoria Park, Christchurch, New Zealand. Pauline and Juliet initially claimed that Mrs Parker had slipped and fallen, but the nature of her injuries indicated otherwise. The police quickly grew suspicious of the girls' stories and these doubts were confirmed when officers searched Pauline's room and found her notebooks and diaries, the last entry of which was headed 'The Day of the Happy Event'. At first Pauline denied that Juliet was involved, but by the following afternoon both had confessed. Their pleas of insanity were rejected and they were found guilty, to be detained 'at Her Majesty's pleasure'. One of the conditions of their eventual release was that they have no further contact with one another. Perhaps unsurprisingly, it was not long before the case began to pique the interest of a range of authors.

Within a year of Pauline and Juliet's conviction the New Zealand writer Bruce Mason had written *The Verdict* (1955), a play based on the trial. Soon afterwards the journalists Tom Gurr and H.H. Cox wrote a non-fiction account in *Famous Australasian Crimes* (1957) and followed this with *Obsession* (1958), a novelisation. Also in 1958, Marijane Meaker, writing under the pseudonym Vin Packer, published her version of the story, a novel with the provocative title *The Evil Friendship*. Nearly a decade later, Reginald Denham and Mary Orr wrote *Minor Murder*, a play first performed at the Savoy

Theatre, London, in 1967. And with some degree of inevitability, a film version was not far behind. Written and directed by the Frenchman, Jöel Séria, the film was entitled *Mais ne nous délivrez pas du mal* (1971) or, in its English transliteration, *Don't Deliver Us from Evil*. The following year saw the publication of Beryl Bainbridge's breakthrough novel *Harriet Said...* (1972), a book partly inspired by Pauline and Juliet's story. After this flurry of activity, interest in the case died down for a few years, only to revive in the late eighties and early nineties. In 1988, Angela Carter wrote an unproduced screenplay treatment, which was published posthumously under its working title 'The Christchurch Murder'. And 1991 saw the first performance of Michelanne Forster's play *Daughters of Heaven*, as well as the publication of the only full-length non-fiction study of the case, Julie Glamuzina and Alison J. Laurie's *Parker and Hulme: A Lesbian View*. Then came Peter Jackson's first mainstream success, *Heavenly Creatures* (1994), a film the director was talked into making by his wife and co-writer, Fran Walsh. Walsh had been "fascinated by the Parker-Hulme case since she was young" (Sibley 224), but her plans to get the story into production were nearly thwarted by a series of rival projects. As Ian Pryor describes in his biography of Jackson, by the middle of 1992 there were 'at least four other Parker-Hulme scripts [...] in various stages of development', including one for Dustin Hoffman's production company, Punch, for which Jackson was mooted as a possible director (Pryor 133).

Recent years have seen some sensitive and often persuasive critical analyses of the crime's significance in terms of the matricidal impulse, sexuality, and the cultural

strictures of 1950s New Zealand,¹ but none of these accounts have analysed the extent to which the fictionalised versions of this case can be viewed as adaptations that use the story as a source text. Each of these versions builds upon, reacts against or even overtly references the versions which have gone before, and each incorporates the known facts in subtly different ways. As Thomas Leitch argues in *Adaptation and Its Discontents* (2007), films based on true stories are ‘seldom treated as adaptation’, yet they draw upon an ambiguous form of text. Leitch suggests that ‘Films based on true stories authenticate themselves by appealing to precursor texts that are nonexistent’, and ‘this appeal to nonexistent precursor texts has the effect of creating these texts through the very act of invoking them’ (Leitch 280, 302), a process that is evident in the numerous depictions of the Parker-Hulme murder. Discussing the case in this way is not to denigrate its real-life significance and impact, but it is to place the emphasis on the *story* element of the maxim ‘based on a true story’. Each adaptation takes factual details such as the closeness of the girls, their parents’ attempts to split them up and, of course, the eventual murder, but each describes a very different version of events. In

¹ For a discussion of the historical background to the crime see Julie Glamuzina and Alison J. Laurie, *Parker and Hulme: A Lesbian View*, which views events from a ‘pro-lesbian, feminist’ viewpoint (Glamuzina and Laurie 17). For a detailed overview of the artistic responses to the crime and the theme of matricide see Marian McCurdy, ‘Women Murder Women’. And for academic, gender-related readings of *Heavenly Creatures* see Michelle Elleray, ‘*Heavenly Creatures* in Godzone’, Corinn Columpar, ‘‘Til Death Do Us Part’, Betty Jay ‘‘Let’s Moider Mother’’, and Alison J. Laurie, ‘Heavenly Images’, which returns to the topic of Laurie’s earlier book and criticises Jackson’s film for its perceived reliance on the discredited *folie à deux* theory of temporary insanity.

Gurr and Cox's preface to *Obsession*, for example, the authors set the sensationalist tone for their treatment of the Parker-Hulme story: 'The strangest, the most incredible, and most terrible parts of this narrative are absolutely true', they write, 'No novelist would have dared to invent these occurrences, these situations, these bizarre occasions' (Gurr and Cox 1958, 6). A real-life 'text' is invoked and, at the same time, adapted by Gurr and Cox, whose novel is pervaded by the same tone of innuendo and moralistic judgement found in their essay on the case. The 'dark and chubby' (33) Alison (Pauline Parker) is the ringleader who is contrasted with the fair, almost angelic Susan (Juliet Hulme), and the juxtaposition of youthful sexuality and murder is played for titillation: 'They were ready for the climax. They were reaching for murder' (92). Contrastingly, and despite its title, Vin Packer's *The Evil Friendship* is less sensationalist. It is the second of Packer's fictionalised true stories about parricide, same-sex relationships and the now discredited '*folie a deux*' theory of temporary insanity, the first of which being the 1954 novel *Whisper His Sin*.² Notwithstanding its pulp credentials *The Evil Friendship* presents a comparatively balanced portrait of the girls, an approach which runs through all of Packer's novels of murder and violence. As John L. Breen writes, 'Packer's novels are totally devoid of either heroes or villains. [...] No one is totally okay, and nearly every character has at least some redeeming qualities' (Breen 273). A similarly complex, though not unproblematic, picture of the murder is presented in Jöel Séria's *Don't*

² *Whisper His Sin* is based on the so-called 'Champagne Cocktail Murders', a 1953 case in which twenty-year-old Harlow Fraden murdered his parents in order to inherit their estate. Packer's *Spring Fire* (1952) is widely considered to be the first lesbian pulp novel.

Deliver Us from Evil, but the emphasis is once again shifted to encompass issues of Roman Catholic authority and hypocrisy. Séria's film imagines the girls reacting against the values of their religion, their school, and their parents; it shows them tormenting the local male population, holding a black mass, and drawing inspiration from the more salacious passages in *Lautréamont* and *Baudelaire*. *Don't Deliver Us* overtly references a broader tradition of anti-establishment French literature and film, and culminates in the girls' murder of a stranded motorist, followed by their onstage self-immolation at a school talent show. As the flames engulf them they read in unison from Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1857). After pressure from the Catholic Church the film was for many years banned in France.

In each of these versions the Parker-Hulme murder is identifiable as the source of the story and, as with the story of the Carmelite nuns discussed by Hutcheon, each adapts it in different yet comparable ways. Indeed, a consistent thread runs through every version of the story in the form of the girls' writing, which plays a prominent role in the lead-up to the murder. The adapters draw upon the fact that Pauline and Juliet wrote stories together and created an elaborate fantasy kingdom known as the 'Fourth World', in which film stars and singers took the role of 'Saints'. Of most significance are Pauline's diaries, which describe their plans for murder and which became central to discussions of guilt and motivation at the trial. References to this writerly aspect of the crime are integral to each fictionalised version, and their inclusion has an almost metafictional effect in the emphasis it places on the roles of writing and fantasy. It also offers a clue as to the story's appeal to such a broad range of adapters, each of whom

reference the source text of Pauline's diaries either indirectly, through newspaper reports, or directly, through transcripts of the diaries themselves. By discussing Angela Carter's 'The Christchurch Murder' and Peter Jackson's *Heavenly Creatures*, it is possible to suggest how two different versions of the same events draw upon this material to adapt the story in individual yet interrelated ways. Doing so helps to reveal a set of complex intertextual relationships with the adapters' earlier work and suggests how they engage with Pauline and Juliet's fantasy world and, most importantly, the text of Pauline's diaries, in order to centralise questions of imagination, agency, and authorship.

In her introduction to *The Curious Room* (1997), a posthumously published collection of Angela Carter's plays and film scripts, Susannah Clapp describes the lineage of Carter's 'interest in parent-killers', an interest which runs through *Come Unto These Yellow Sands* (1979), a radio play about the artist and parricide Richard Dadd, and Carter's two short stories about the axe-murderer Lizzie Borden (Clapp x). This interest continues in 'The Christchurch Murder', a screenplay commissioned by Euston Films and based on the Parker-Hulme case. As Charlotte Crofts describes in '*Anagrams of Desire*' (2003), Carter developed the screenplay 'from newspaper cuttings, the girls' police statements and transcripts of the trial' (Crofts 195), and the treatment shows evidence of close engagement with the facts of the case, including the notorious diaries. Carter's screenplay represents only one stage in the process of adaptation but it nevertheless provides a significant case study in aspects of this process. As Boozer suggests, '[r]ecognizing this specificity of textual stages not only confirms adaptation's

intertextual status but can also point more precisely to the contributions of key individuals and their most significant impact along the way' (21). In this manner it is possible to see how, although already imbricated in a collaborative process with the production company, 'The Christchurch Murder' bears identifiable traces of Carter's authorship.

In contrast to both her play about Dadd and the stories about Lizzie Borden, Carter's depiction of the Parker-Hulme murder is an uncharacteristically subdued affair. Other than changing the girls' names to Lena and Nerissa, Carter's screenplay sticks closely to the known facts of the case, meaning that 'The Christchurch Murder' contains 'few of the imaginative transformation sequences [one] might normally expect from a Carter screenplay' (Crofts 195). Nevertheless, certain recurrent themes link it to Carter's other work. Of Carter's Lizzie Borden stories, 'Lizzie's Tiger' (1981) and 'The Fall River Axe Murders' (1981), Anja Müller-Wood has written that 'Borden may be guilty, but she is a victim of an environment that forces her to exist against her nature'; 'For Carter, she is no evil other, but the product of her world' (Müller-Wood 283, 287). However, as Müller-Wood goes on to argue, Borden is not described as a victim in a simplistic sense: although she is clearly a product of her stifling environment, Carter 'accepts Borden's guilt as the inevitable precondition for making sense of the murder of her family as a conscious, rebellious act' (293). Equally, there are few easy answers to be found in Carter's portraits of Parker and Hulme. She implies a degree of neglect in the description of Nerissa in particular – 'This neglected child's parents assuage their guilt by lavishing material things upon her' (347) – but neither girl is depicted as a martyr and neither is

made an unequivocal victim of circumstance. As Marian McCurdy has argued, Carter instead focuses on 'the relationships between the two girls, the two mothers and each set of mother and daughter, revealing the complex desires of each woman in their individual social situation' (McCurdy 184). The girls have a kind of '[m]ad love' (354), which is never explicitly lesbian, but about which their parents are nervous and unsettled. Lena tells Nerissa that her mother is 'standing in the way of [their] happiness' (385).

The parallels between 'The Christchurch Murder' and Carter's other depictions of parricide continue when, in a seeming reference to the Borden murders, she describes 'the rhythmic blows of an axe on wood' punctuating the otherwise silent landscape on the day of the murder (339, 387). Then, later in the script, though earlier chronologically, a particular gravestone attracts Lena and Nerissa's attention:

LENA: Here's a girl who killed her mother.

Childbirth. See?

NERISSA: Is that all. I thought you meant with an axe. Such as we might have to try, one day, when they get too much on top of us (375).

The prominence of the axe refers not only to the Borden murders but also to Richard Dadd and his most famous painting. *The Fairy Feller's Master-Stroke* (1855-64) imagines a sylvan scene in which a fairy woodsman is frozen on the brink of bringing his axe down upon a hazelnut. It was painted during Dadd's time in the Bethlem psychiatric hospital, to which he was committed after stabbing his father to death. In Carter's radioplay about Dadd, *Come Unto These Yellow Sands*, an explicit connection is made between the

murder and the painting. Carter imagines a dialogue between the 'Fairy Feller', an anonymous male narrator, and Dadd:

FAIRY FELLER: And here we are, stuck fast for all eternity, waiting for me to strike. Waiting...

DADD: ...waiting...in the rock and castle of seclusion...

FAIRY FELLER: And he's too scared of what he did to let on he knows my secret. That the blow I am about to strike, which he prevents me from, is the very blow he struck himself! (Carter 1997, 55)

The axe in the painting is linked to Dadd's murder of his father and is described as an attempt to halt the action and prevent the fatal blow from falling; in art, unlike life, Dadd is able to turn back and to freeze time. The references to axes in 'The Christchurch Murder' in turn suggest the Borden and Dadd murders, as well as Carter's fictionalised depictions of them, and identifying these references helps to establish the links between Carter's depictions of parricide and the way they undercut simplifying notions about madness (Dadd), hysteria (Borden), and evil (Parker and Hulme).

Carter's appropriation and reimagination of her source material is further evident when, in 'The Christchurch Murder', she portrays the girls visiting a freak show at a fair. This imagined scene continues the carnivalesque themes of *Nights at the Circus* (1984) and, of most relevance here, the Lizzie Borden story 'Lizzie's Tiger', in which Lizzie sneaks off to visit the circus. At the circus, she witnesses sights and sounds which are alien to her and, in an ambiguous and disturbing scene, finds herself masturbating a drunk but drawing the line at kissing his beery mouth. Here Carter warns against easy

assumptions: 'Don't think any of this frightened her' (321), the narrator advises; Lizzie is indomitable and she never loses control. Similarly, when Lena and Nerissa visit the freak show in 'The Christchurch Murder' they are undaunted by the Alligator boy who 'Suggestive, obscene' tells them 'Touch me here' (381). Nerissa, 'Nervous, reluctant, disgusted', begins to move her hand towards the tank, at which point the scene cuts. The action resumes with an exterior shot of the showground where the girls are found 'shrieking with laughter' (382). They decide that they too are freaks, 'beautiful freaks' (382). As Müller-Wood argues of the Borden stories, then, Carter 'challenges the idealization of childhood as a natural state of innocence' (Müller-Wood 294); and although 'The Christchurch Murder' is in some ways uncharacteristic of Carter's work, it continues her nuanced exploration of parricide and the complex questions of motivation and agency. Carter eschews simplicity and in her version the girls are neither evil monsters nor tragic victims of an unsympathetic society.

Carter's adaptation of Parker and Hulme's story therefore bears the traces of her authorship, but it is not necessary to return to intentionality in order to describe this. Leitch writes of the necessity of negotiating 'the slippery slope away from adaptation studies to intertextual studies' (302), but this relationship is perhaps less treacherous than he implies. Rather, adaptation relies on a process of exchange in which intertextuality plays a vital role. In the case of the Parker-Hulme murder it is possible to identify a series of coherent intertextual references which speak back to a real-life source text. In fact, Peter Jackson has suggested that making *Heavenly Creatures*

involved a similar process of adaptation to his *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2001-03), as both demanded adherence to a pre-existing narrative:

We got to the point where we didn't want to make anything up or put anything in the movie just because it suited us. I was reminded, much later, of the experience of making *Heavenly Creatures* when we made *The Lord of the Rings*.

With *Rings*, we were constrained by the book [...] but with *Heavenly Creatures*, whilst it wasn't adapted from a book, we were basing it on our researches into the real life events to an extent that we ended up with our own version of a Tolkienesque bible that we then had to stick to when making the film (Sibley 254).

Of course Jackson did no *have* to stick to this 'bible' when making *Heavenly Creatures*, but he nevertheless appeals to a series of source texts in order to structure and authenticate the film. Indeed, Jackson describes an almost literal example of a process described by Leitch in *Film Adaptation and Its Discontents*:

The true story behind *Dog Day Afternoon*, *Salvador*, *GoodFellas*, or *Schindler's List* may be buried in newspaper accounts or fictionalized exposés or the historical record, but once these stories have been invoked, they have the same textual status as the books by Nicholas Pileggi or Thomas Keneally' (Leitch 302).

As Leitch argues, the evocation of a true story suggests a process of cross-reference and intertextuality similar to that found in a literary adaptation, with the literary text substituted for documentary sources. In fact, having initially read newspaper reports

and other fiction and non-fiction interpretations of the case, Jackson and Walsh reacted against pulp and socio-political accounts and instead went back to what they saw as a set of more balanced, stable source documents:

Fran and I talked about what we had read so far and I remember saying, “We can’t base a movie on this stuff. We have to research the real events for ourselves...” So, we started to do exactly that: ignoring all the newspaper accounts and going back to the original sources, such as court papers and trial transcripts (Sibley 225).

Jackson includes these ‘original sources’ in his ‘Tolkienesque bible’, all the time invoking the idea that he is adapting rather than fictionalising. Central among the sources used by Jackson are the girls writings and, in particular, Pauline’s diaries.

Like Carter’s screenplay, Jackson’s film is a nuanced and sympathetic portrait of Parker and Hulme, to the extent that Jackson has described the case as ““a murder story without villains”” (Braunias 62). In some respects the inclusion of surrealistic elements and fantasy sequences in *Heavenly Creatures* can be seen as more typical of Carter than Carter’s own script,³ and these fantasy sequences render the girls’ interior worlds through a clever combination of computer animation and more traditional techniques.⁴ Yet from the outset it is made clear that Jackson, like Carter, will not depart significantly from the known facts. Before the film’s title sequence, a caption appears on the screen.

³ As Charlotte Crofts has noted, Jackson employs the kind of ‘sophisticated make-up and animation techniques that [one] might have expected from Carter’ (Crofts 198n7).

⁴ The figures in the fantasy sequences, for example, appear to be made using either stop-motion or computer-generated imagery, but were in fact created by dressing actors in rubber suits. See Sibley 240-41.

It makes no mention of the murder, though the opening prolepsis has already shown the two blood-soaked girls running through the woods and screaming. The caption reads:

During 1953 and 1954 Pauline Yvonne Parker kept diaries recording her friendship with Juliet Marion Hulme.

This is their story.

All diary entries are in Pauline's own words...

This is to be *their* story, a story which, the caption implies, will be told without judgement, through the girls' eyes, and with recourse to Pauline's own thoughts as recorded in the diaries. Indeed, the film contains little of the sensationalism that one might have anticipated from a film maker who made his reputation with the comedy splatter of *Bad Taste* (1987), *Meet the Feebles* (1989), and *Braindead* (1992). In retrospect, however, it was not such a leap.

In each of Jackson's earlier films, New Zealand forms the apparently mundane backdrop against which outlandish, often grotesque events take place. *Bad Taste* opens with an image of Queen Elizabeth II projected on to a reel-to-reel tape machine as it plays a recording of a panicked telephone call. The caller reports an alien invasion of Jackson's home town, Pukerua Bay, to the Department of Internal Affairs. A minister's voice then cuts in to advise a 'full-scale invasion alert', but the shadowy figure listening to the recording decides that 'perhaps that could all be a bit showy' – that 'this is a job for real men'. His bizarre, robotic finger then extends to press the telephone extension for 'THE BOYS', who are listed underneath 'P.M.', 'QUEEN' and 'MUM'. 'The Boys' are, of

course, a ragtag band of mates (played by Jackson and his friends), who are charged with defending small-town New Zealand from flesh-eating invaders. It becomes apparent that the alien spacecraft has taken the form of a rocket-propelled colonial-style mansion, whose role is surely related not only to New Zealand's colonial history but also to one of the abiding themes in Jackson's work: the potential of the seemingly ordinary to contain or be transformed by the extraordinary. In *Meet the Feebles*, for example, bizarre, Jim Henson-style creatures drive around in stretched Morris Minors – Morris Minors being the vehicle of choice in Jackson's early work – and deal drugs whilst playing golf on a suburban golf course. And in *Braindead* there is a grotesque scene in which the hero, Lionel, attempts to retain an air of gentility as parts of his rapidly zombifying mother fall off into her food, and another during which the pair become involved in a life and death tussle as the long-running radio soap *The Archers*, with its tales of English rural affairs, blasts out in the background.

From the outset *Heavenly Creatures* also draws upon this almost Lynchian contrast between the apparently mundane and the noir or grotesque. It begins with a stylised 'archive' film about an apparently sleepy, genteel Christchurch, before cutting to the screaming girls in the immediate aftermath of the murder. The film then moves chronologically backwards in order to tell the story of their friendship, from their initial recognition of one another as kindred spirits to their eventual plans for murder. Jackson also charts the development Pauline and Juliet's increasingly fantastical dream world, which informs and eventually subsumes the more mundane reality. Like Jackson's earlier work, the film plays on the overlaps and intersections between the two levels, as

in the scenes where Pauline and Juliet's fantasy prince, Diello, manifests himself in the real world to dispatch pesky patriarchs such as doctors and priests. These fantasy scenes are based on the known facts about the girls' imagined 'Fourth World', but the way they are realised describes a lineage back to the innovative, low-budget special effects of Jackson's earlier work and to his repeated juxtapositioning of the mundane and the bizarre, the grotesque and the comic.

Jackson also depicts the story of Parker and Hulme in a customarily knowing, intertextual manner. Just as his earlier films included allusions to the bazooka-toting John Rambo of *Rambo: First Blood Part II (Bad Taste)* or the Russian roulette scene in *Deer Hunter (Meet the Feebles)*, or the Skull Island of *King Kong*, the runaway pram from *The Battleship Potemkin*, and the mother in the cellar from *Psycho* (all in *Brain Dead*), so Jackson self-consciously draws upon a series of intertextual references in *Heavenly Creatures*. The fantasy scenes, for example, contain nods to the stop-motion animation of figures such as Ray Harryhausen, to whom Peter Jackson has acknowledged a debt (Sibley 33-35), and there are also significant allusions to Carol reed's *The Third Man*. Reed's 1949 film inspires a sequence during which Orson Welles's Harry Lime stalks the girls home from the cinema, and it is Welles whom Juliet pictures as she and Pauline enact 'how each Saint would make love in bed'.⁵ Jackson even includes in *Heavenly Creatures* a reference to Séria's *Don't Deliver Us from Evil*, when, as Pauline and Juliet ceremoniously burn their Mario Lanza records on the night before the murder, they are

⁵ Welles was one of Pauline and Juliet's 'saints', who were figures that held a special place in their private lore.

framed holding hands with flames leaping up in the foreground. This echoes the climactic onstage suicide in Séria's film, in which the girls hold hands and remain impassive as they are consumed by a growing curtain of flame. Pauline and Juliet did build a fire on the night before the murder and, although he has not acknowledged this link, Jackson's treatment of this detail provides yet another example of the way in which he, like Carter, adapts both the texts that preceded his own version and the texts behind the real-life story.

At the time of the trial, Pauline and Juliet 'were reported to have written six novels, as well as plays, poetry, and an opera' (Glamuzina and Laurie 61), but it is Pauline's diaries which have attracted the most attention. Naturally, much was made of these diaries during the court case and a good deal of the subsequent controversy over the girls' motivations has centred on them. The exegesis of this text has been pivotal to people's attempts at understanding the murder, but what is also apparent is that the diaries formed a script for the murder itself: Pauline and Juliet's elaborate formulation of the Fourth World and their casting of themselves as misunderstood heroines and artistic geniuses describe a story of which the plan to kill Pauline's mother was the climax. This lore is set out in Pauline's poem 'The Ones I Worship', which concludes:

'Tis indeed a miracle, one must feel
 That two such heavenly creatures are real,
 Both sets of eyes though different far, hold many mysteries strange,
 Impassively, they watch the race of man decay and change
 Hatred burning bright in the brown eyes with enemies for fuel,

Icy scorn glitters in the grey eyes, contemptuous and cruel,

Why are men such fools they will not realize

The wisdom that is hidden behind those strange eyes,

And these wonderful people are you and I (Glamuzina and Laurie 124-25).

It is from this poem that the title *Heavenly Creatures* is borrowed, but the significance of this and the girls' other writings extend beyond such overt allusions. In his funding application for *Heavenly Creatures*, Jackson wrote that "'Pauline and Juliet were two very imaginative but normal girls'", who "'did nothing that most of us haven't done – kept diaries, played fantasy games, sneaked out at night, had imaginary friends, planned impossible trips, experimented with sex... even fantasising about killing your parent.'" The real difference was that "'they went one step further...'" (Sibley 228). It is the fact that the girls went 'one step further' and murdered Pauline's mother that made this story into the stuff of fiction and film, but the imaginative, authorial element provided by the girls' writing also provides a site to reflect on the process of adaptation itself.

In 'The Christchurch Murder' Angela Carter describes the importance of writing and, more specifically, scripting to the development of Lena and Nerissa's plans. As McCurdy has noted, Carter does not mention the girls' Fourth World fantasies but she does make a connection between 'the dream factory of Hollywood and the fantasies produced by it'; fantasies 'that stimulate Lena and Nerissa's very real desire and dissatisfaction with their present realities' (McCurdy 183). The power of cinematic

fantasy and projection is important elsewhere in Carter's work,⁶ and here she draws upon the girls' obsession with film to describe their plotting in terms of a script. In the opening prolepsis, for example, the police arrive to begin their questioning and Nerissa tells Lena 'They're here! We must stick to the script, whatever happens!' (348). This sense of fantasy and authorial invention continues in a later scene in which the girls discuss prostitution as a means to finance their Hollywood dreams. Lena is finally persuaded to do it because it will be a "'terrific experience, for a writer'" (372). In the first instance fiction structures reality and in the second instance experience is sought in order to feed fiction, but throughout the screenplay the boundaries between reality and fantasy are shown to be unstable. Indeed, the final plan to kill Lena's mother is described in cinematic terms and with scant regard for actuality or contingency: 'Think of it this way,' Lena reasons, 'that we've got to write the script for the perfect murder, and then we've got to stick to it. | And then we'll be free.' (386). The plans for murder take place according to the internal logic of Lena and Nerissa's fantasy and are described as an adaptation of a text they have together written. These interludes represent instances of what Karen Diehl has described as 'traces of the authorial on film' and serve to 'construct the figure of the author as a point of narrative origin, the "Once upon a time" of adaptation' (Diehl 91); again, they invoke a source text.

Heavenly Creatures portrays this textual world in a literal manner – in details such as the poetic reference in the title and the opening statement about telling the

⁶ *The Passion of New Eve* (1977), for example, opens with the novel's narrator, Evelyn, watching the imaginary movie star Tristessa de St Ange in a film production of *Wuthering Heights*: 'you were just as beautiful as you had been twenty years before, would always be so beautiful as long as celluloid remained in complicity with the phenomenon of persistence of vision' (Carter 1982, 5).

story in Pauline's 'own words' – but also in Pauline's voiceovers and the fantasy sequences set in the Fourth World. These fantasies spill over from the Fourth World into the 'real' world and it is when a pink gemstone traverses this border that 'a breakdown in the division between the two realms' takes place, allowing the girls to kill (Elleray 232). As Stella Bruzzi has suggested, Jackson's depiction of Pauline and Juliet's inner lives emphasises the sense that for them story and actuality become increasingly co-existent and intertwining: 'Whereas most films that deal with the relationship between the real and the unconscious (from *Spellbound* to *Sirens*) never lose sight of the dividing line between the two, *Heavenly Creatures* dwells on the smudging of those boundaries' (Bruzzi 66). This development means the opening note declaring that 'All diary entries are in Pauline's own words' can be read as both a statement concerning the factual basis of the film and an acknowledgement of the textual and imaginary world behind the crime itself. Indeed, as she prepares the weapon on the morning of the murder, Pauline displaces her concerns by talking about an opera she is working on; it is 'a three act story with a tragic end'. A tragic end to Pauline and Juliet's story is, of course, inevitable and this sense of inevitability is reinforced by the film's cyclical structure. The opening scenes of *Heavenly Creatures* are intercut with a black and white sequence depicting the girls running into a happy embrace with Juliet's parents on board a departing ship.⁷ This sequence then reappears twice, once on the night before the murder and once at the very end of the film. In the final instance, however, there is a

⁷ Having separated from her husband, Juliet's mother had planned to emigrate to South Africa and to take Juliet with her. The imminent prospect of separation has been seen as a contributing factor in the crime.

notable difference: in this version Juliet departs on the ship as Pauline, powerless to do anything, cries and screams among a crowd of well-wishers on the shore. The recurrence of these images charts the transformation of hopeful fantasy into bleak reality: Pauline and Juliet's fairytale has turned into a nightmare and they are no longer authors of their own fates.

Such transformations are suggestive of adaptation itself, in which a series of processes serve to decentre authorship. Whilst Jackson's and Carter's signatures are evident in their adaptations of the Parker Hulme case, the authorial presences in their work act as a reminder of this movement between 'original' story, screenplay and film. 'The Christchurch Murder' and *Heavenly Creatures* are recognisable both as products of the individual adapters and as adaptations of the same source material, a process mimicked in Carter's and Jackson's portrayals of the real-life case and their casting of Pauline and Juliet as authors unable to retain agency or control their story. Their role is tacitly authorial and metafictional because, as Diehl writes, the presence of the authorial on screen 'appears as an additional fiction to underscore the process at work, that is, adaptation'. In the films discussed by Diehl, and in the adaptations discussed here, the author's presence in fact destabilises any simplistic sense of authorship or agency: 'Making the author return within the fiction can dismantle him/her as an ideological figure imagined as master of his/her literary production'; it emphasises 'the narrativisation of the process of writing, the process of reading and the process of adapting to screen itself' (Diehl 102-03). The girls' writings and the subsequent inscription of their fantasies in the various versions of the Parker-Hulme murder signals

the presence of a source text and acts as a metaphorical demonstration that neither the adapters nor Parker and Hulme are the ultimate, godlike authors of the story. In the end the girls lose agency and their writing is turned over to the courts and those who would later interpret the case: their motivations and intentions can never truly be known and they are depicted as both an authorial presence and a metaphor for the process of adaptation itself.

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